

Hemorrhage

by Megatronus-Prime

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Summary: What was going through John's mind once he was brought aboard the Infinity after defeating the Didact? What revelations did he come across?

Hemorrhage

A machine.

That's all he was. Without her, that is.

The two of them complimented each other in that regard, he carried out her tasks and she was his humanity.

But now what?

He stared out past the window of the observation deck at Earth. As he did, her last words echoed in the back of his mind, "\_Welcome home, John."\_ She was right. This was his home now. While Eridanus II may have been where he was born, Earth was where he would stay for the remainder of his days. And although he was bred for war, he felt no drive to join it anymore. He felt empty. Just then, he heard footsteps walking behind him. He knew it was someone else coming to offer their condolences. He just wished they would leave him be.

"Mind if I join you?"

It was Captain Lasky. He turned to face him as his training forced his next words from his mouth.

"Of course not, sir."

Lasky looked away for a moment with the faintest hint of a meek smirk. He looked back at John.

"At ease, Chief. Feels kind of odd for you to call me sir."

John turned back towards the sight of Earth as Lasky made his way next to him. The two stared outside together for a short time. The silence between the two could now hopefully leave John to his thoughts.

"Beautiful isn't she? I don't get to see her often enough."

However, Lasky felt the need to do the same thing the others had.

"I grew up on New Harmony; attended Corbulo Military Academy. Never saw Earth in person till I was an adult, butâ€¦ I still think of her as home."

John simply stood, waiting for him to be done so he could be alone once moreâ€¦ Like he would for a long time.

"You don't talk much do you?"

No he didn't, at least when he wasn't around her. Why couldn't he bring himself to say her name now?

"Chief I won't pretend to know how you feel. I've lost people I care about, butâ€¦ never anything like you're going through."

He felt he should at least say something at this point. If nothing else to make Lasky feel like he hadn't wasted his time coming up here.

"Our duty as soldiers is to protect humanity, whatever the cost."

There was a pause. He heard Lasky shift beside him, and then came his response.

"You say that like soldiers and humanity are two different things. I mean, soldiers aren't machines -" John looked over at him. \_There's that word again\_. "- we're just people." He turned to face Earth.

"I'll let you have the deck to yourself."

He turned his head slightly to see Lasky walk off out of the corner of his eye. As the sound of his footsteps grew further away, he looked back to his new home again. Once he felt Lasky was out of earshot, he spoke to himself under his breath.

"She said that to me onceâ€¦ About being a machine."

Lasky's footsteps never faulted, and as such, John assumed he was the only one to hear those words. As the sound of feet hitting metal floor eventually faded into silence, John simply stood. Now left to his thoughts, he realized he had nothing to think about. Nothing that didn't involve her, that is. He still didn't know why he couldn't say her name now. He knew she meant a lot to him, but this felt too deep. Too deep for a Spartan to ever feel. If he knew he was a machine, then what was this aching feeling in his gut? It made him hurt to simply think about her now. His armor had never felt as heavy as it did right now. His helmet had never felt as constricting as it did

right now. His heart had never hurt as it did right now.

He placed his hands on the railing in front of him and looked down.

\_Heart?\_

When had their connection gotten this deep that he didn't even notice how much she meant to him? He had taken her presence for granted, and now that she was gone he finally knew what it was. Again, he found himself unable to say a simple word. It was as if his years of training and combat had affected his ability to do so. He realized what this was and now he couldn't even say it. He cared for her. No, it was deeper than that, and he knew it. His mind, one who only knew the tactics of warfare, knew what this was but refused to let him say it. He began to clench the bar in front of him without knowing.

\_Say it! Admit to what this feeling is, and maybe this unbearable pain will lessen! \_

He shut his eyes tight, concentrating.

\_You know now what she meant to you and yet you're too weak to admit it!\_

He began to clench his teeth. Why was this so hard?

\_Say it, damnit! \_

He was gripping the handrail so hard at this point that he had compressed it and could almost clench his fists as if it wasn't there.

\_Why won't you just say it?\_

The muscles in his arms tightened as his eyes began to feel wet.

\_Look at what simply thinking about her does to you! What's so hard about just saying that word?\_

Something trickled down from his right eye to his lips. Since he couldn't wipe it away with his hand, he cleaned it off with his tongue. Why was it salty?

\_SAY IT.\_

He opened his eyes, what he now knew as tears trickling down for the first time since his childhood. His grip on the handrail released and his arms relaxed. It was still quiet around him, but he didn't care if anyone heard what he said next.

"I love you Cortana."

And with that, he tensed as his pain intensified. If he wasn't trained to resist pain, he would have doubled over at this point. He looked up at Earth. New Phoenix may be lost, but the rest of the planet survived because the one dearest to him died. Cortana died protecting him, and he would never forget her. To the UNSC she was just a simple AI, something that could be tossed out and replaced at

any time. To him, though, she was the only person he truly loved. Yes, a person. She was the human and he was the machine. He let go of the bar and looked at what he had done to it. He looked at his hands, which were unscathed. Standing up straight, he decided to remove his armor. The same armor that once held a steadfast and loyal soldier, but now held a broken and lonely man. He took one last look at Earth and turned around. He began walking. Unlike his usual textbook military walk, this one was one of sorrow. He began to make his way to the Spartan deck.

Moving through the corridors he had walked through on his way to the observation deck, he just stared at the ground. Love. Such a simple word, but that's what this was. His care for Cortana had blossomed into something he knew not he was capable of. As he rounded another corner, he began to walk down a brightly lit hallway, contrasting the dark of the viewing deck he was at minutes ago. Why didn't this revelation come to him when she was still alive? He clenched his right hand, angry at himself for shutting off basic emotions. What if she felt the same way? What had he denied her at their last meeting? The body she formed from the remaining Forerunner hardlight was the closest thing to a real body she would ever experience. Why didn't he at least touch her hand as it rested on his armor? Why didn't he embrace her for the first and last time? Why didn't he tell her what she meant to him? So many possibilities ran through his head, making himself more and more furious with himself. Then one crept in that sated the anger, albeit for the wrong reasons.

\_What if she didn't feel the same way?\_

He chuckled to himself, \_of course she didâ€¦ Didn't she? \_That was why her voice was trembling as she explained her sacrifice...\_ Right?\_ He stopped in his tracks. He could never know. Never know if she cared about him because of her programming, the fact that she was meant to protect him from the beginning, or if she grew to love him as he did her. He shook his head, relieving himself of these thoughts. \_It doesn't matter. I loved her â€" no, I still do â€" and nothing will ever change that.\_ He remembered another thing she said on their last journey together.

\_"They'll pair you with another A.I. Maybe even another Cortana model if Halsey lets them. It won't be me... You know that right?"\_

Like hell they would. He would go the rest of his life without another A.I. if it meant betraying their bond. All their memories, their trust for one another would be wiped out in the new model. He would have to start over from square one. He began walking again, this time with a purpose. As he made his way to the enormous Spartan deck, he walked down the ground floor. A few of the new Spartans ran on treadmills ahead of him as he approached them. One stumbled at the sight of him, and the one called Palmer looked shocked to see him; he paid them no mind. As he passed them, he looked to the right and found an open station. He walked up to it, finding himself too large to fit in it as it was designed. He merely turned around and outstretched his arms as if they were in the machine. The team at the station knew what to do. They started with his forearms, and as the panels fell, the weight lifted felt odd already. He bent his arms to get used to the feeling. As his chest piece was unbolted and fell to the ground, his thoughts drifted to Cortana again. He began to think this would be common from here on out.

\_"They let me pick, did I ever tell you that? Choose whichever Spartan I wanted."\_

The back of his torso armor fell to the ground with a thud similar to the one his chest piece emanated. The spaulders were then removed and slid off his arms, clanging against his thigh armor on their way to the floor.

\_"You know me. I did my research. Watched as you became the soldier we needed you to be."\_

Said thigh armor was taken off next. Half fell outwards and the other halves hit each other as they landed between his feet.

\_"Like the others, you were strong and swift and brave. A natural leader."\_

Next were his legs and boots. The panels on his legs scattered as the ones on his arms did. He lifted his left foot, then the right, as the boots were undone.

\_"But you had something they didn't. Something no one saw... but me. Can you guess?"\_

He felt a clamp grab the back of his helmet, over where his chip containing Cortana should go.

\_"Luck. Was I wrong?"\_

The screw on the back of his helmet was removed and the sides were loosened as a result. \_No, Cortana\_, \_you were right.\_ he thought to himself. \_I am lucky. \_

His helmet was lifted and his face, containing eyes that had seen both horrible tragedy and great beauty, was revealed to the world for the first time in years.

\_Lucky to have known you.\_

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